Subtle and Subliminal Electoral Mobilisation: A Priming Experiment

Martin Nyhuis, Jordy F. Gosselt and Martin Rosema*
University of Twente

ABSTRACT
The act of voting is one of the most widely studied political activities, but at the same time one of the most poorly understood. Although many factors that affect the chance that citizens participate in an election have been identified, the explanatory power of models based on these factors is rather limited. We argue that this may be due to the neglect of subtle psychological processes. We test this idea in two priming experiments. In the first study participants were subtly primed with a word puzzle that included words that either stimulated activism or passivism. In a second experiment participants were primed with similar words, but subliminally. Results showed that subtly primed participants in the activism condition reported stronger voting intentions than those in the passivism condition. However, no such effects were found in the second study. These findings suggest that individuals can be stimulated (or inhibited) to vote through subtle psychological processes. We discuss the implications of our results for the study of voting behaviour as well as campaigns aimed at electoral mobilisation.

* Corresponding author
Martin Rosema
Centre for the Study of Democracy
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 53 489 3280
E-mail: m.rosema@utwente.nl

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INTRODUCTION

There is presumably no form of political behaviour that has received more scholarly attention than the act of voting. Researchers have identified many factors that influence citizens’ decision to vote or abstain, including many individual-level characteristics of voters as well as a range of contextual factors related to the political and electoral system (for a review and meta-analysis, see Smets & Van Ham, 2013). Nevertheless, the explanatory power of models of voting is still limited. One of the reasons for this lack of understanding, we argue, is the fact that voting behaviour, like other types of behaviour, is influenced by subtle psychological processes that have largely been neglected by electoral researchers. In this paper we present two priming experiments that address these processes.

Electoral turnout can be studied in two ways, namely at the individual level and at the aggregate level. The first approach focuses on the decision making by individual citizens and typically addresses the question why some people vote whereas others abstain, or why people vote at all (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974; Blais, 2000; Geys, 2006). The second approach focuses on the turnout rates in elections and typically addresses the question why turnout rates are higher in some countries or some elections as compared to others, or why turnout has declined in the past decades (Franklin, 2004). Some studies combine both approaches and look at how individual-level and system-level characteristics interact with each other (Anduiza Perea, 2002). In this paper we are interested in the individual-level perspective and focus on factors that influence citizens’ decision to (not) vote when an election is coming up.

In a meta-analysis based on 90 articles from ten different journals in political science Smets and Van Ham (2013) identified a large set of variables that have been put forward as explanatory factors in models of voting. These included several individual-level variables that they labelled ‘psychological’, such as party identification, political interest and satisfaction with democracy. Whereas these three variables have a clear link with politics, Smets and Van Ham also analysed psychological variables that have nothing to do with politics as such, like mental health, trust in others, and a hardworking personality. Although the first two did not have a significant impact on turnout, the latter did. This nicely illustrates that electoral behaviour is also influenced by non-political factors. One of the reasons that the explanatory power of models of voting is rather limited, is that such factors have largely been neglected by electoral researchers. We probably have a fairly good idea of the political factors that influence the act voting, but our understanding of the more general psychological processes that have an impact on the decision to vote or abstain is rather limited.
Previous research has shown that one of such factors that influence the chance that citizens cast a ballot is the degree to which they are, more in general, active or inactive (Noguchi, Handly & Albarracín, 2010). This means that factors that influence people’s level of activity will also influence their tendency to vote. The level of activity may be conceptualised as a stable personality characteristic, but also as a temporary mood (or as a combination of both). If we assume that a person’s level of activity is not (only) a long-term stable characteristic, but may vary from day to day (and also within a day), and if the general level of activity influences the tendency to vote, this leads to interesting expectations about what moves voters and also about the potential for mobilisation campaigns. This is relevant in the light of the fact that substantial numbers of the voters hesitate about the act of voting and appear to decide last minute (Van der Kolk, Aarts & Rosema, 2007).

In an intriguing laboratory experiment Noguchi et al. (2010) studied the psychological processes related to individuals’ level of activity in the context of the 2008 U.S. Presidential elections by focusing on a subtle prime that is unrelated to politics. They asked participants to do a task in which they had to complete 20 word fragments, of which 12 were neutral and 8 were related either to action concepts (e.g. active, doing, making) or to inaction concepts (e.g. calm, freeze, pause). They found that participants in the action condition reported significantly stronger political participation intentions than participants in the inaction condition (the dependent variable was a measure that combined voting, campaigning, and influencing others). This illustrates that voters may be influenced by factors that as such have nothing to do with politics and are not associated by them with the act of voting. We refer to these as subtle psychological processes.

In other domains, such as clinical psychology and psychiatry, the notion of an active mood has often been used, especially in relation to low mood or depression and related disorders (e.g. Wilkins et al., 2006). In the emotion literature moods, as well as emotion episodes, have often been conceived of as a combination of a pleasant-unpleasant dimension and an arousal-calm dimension (Mayer, Salovey, Gomberg-Kaufman & Blainey, 1991). In the political science literature the notions of active and passive are presumably most strongly associated with Barber’s (1992) study of presidential character, in which he analysed personality in terms of positive versus negative and active versus passive. Whereas his study conceived of the active-passive dimension as a stable personality characteristic and focused on political elites, in this paper we focus on temporary moods and the mass level. The main hypothesis is that being in an active or inactive mood influences the decision to vote or abstain and this mood is influenced by subtle psychological processes.
In this paper we therefore seek to enhance our understanding of subtle psychological processes and their effect on electoral participation. We present two priming experiments that resemble the study by Noguchi et al. (2010) and go one step further. In the first study we present participants a word puzzle that is embedded in a leaflet about voting and seek to replicate the mobilisation effect in a non-American context, namely German municipal elections. Furthermore, we wondered if similar effects will also occur if the attempt to influence the decision to vote is made in an even more subtle way, namely through subliminal priming. This means that individuals are confronted with stimuli that are presented for such a short time, and typically ‘masked’ by a subsequent stimulus, that they are not consciously aware that they processed the stimulus. In the electoral context a well-known example is the presentation of the word ‘RATS’ when Al Gore and Democrats were discussed in a campaign advertisement by the Republican Party (Weinberger & Westen, 2008). We therefore conduct a second priming experiment in which action and inaction words are shown subliminally and test their effect on the tendency to vote. This experiment was carried out in the laboratory of Stony Brook University in the United States during the campaign of the presidential primaries in 2011.

From here the paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we discuss subtle and subliminal priming. Next we present the two experimental studies and discuss their results. In the final section we draw conclusions about what these experiments tell us about the subtle psychological processes that influence voting decisions, discuss the relevance for mobilisation campaigns, and we sketch avenues for future research.

**SUBTLE AND SUBLIMINAL PRIMING**

Attempts to persuade people are often obvious, because both the attempt and the aim are clear. Campaign activities funded by the government to call for citizens to vote are a clear example. However, much persuasion takes place in more subtle ways. For example, supermarkets influence consumer behaviour on the basis of the direction people walk (clockwise or anti-clockwise) and background music. The fact that subtle mental processes are important in affecting human behaviour has been shown by studies for more than one hundred years and a wide range of topics (Dijksterhuis, Aarts, & Smith, 2005), including voting behaviour (Bargh, 2006). However, despite that it seems obvious that subtle influence can also play a role in turnout, they are often neglected in studies regarding voter turnout.
Numerous experimental studies have demonstrated the power of subtle processes in many domains on multiple dependent variables, including for example arousal (Dutton & Aron, 1974), attitude formation (Zajonc, 1968), and actual behaviour (North, Hargreaves, & McKendrick, 1999, p. 274). Although subtle, the primes offered can consciously be detected by the participant, but not consciously linked to the dependent variable. This feature of subtle processing is quite different when comparing it with the most invisible form of persuasion: subliminal influence. Participants in subliminal conditions are exposed to a stimulus (prime), such as a word, a photo, or the immediate presentation of a mask (such as a letter string) before measuring an attitude or behaviour. However, ‘With very brief exposure (in presentation in the centre of the visual field usually between 20 to 40 milliseconds) and good masking, participants typically perceive hardly a flash’ (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010, p. 88).

While subtle priming is very common in the social world and well known from advertising, subliminal priming is presumably less widespread typically carried out in the laboratory (Lodge & Taber, 2013). However, there are some promising findings that show the importance of power of this subliminal form of persuasion, also in the area of political behaviour (Bargh, 2006). For example, during elections in Israel participants were primed subliminally with their national flag for several milliseconds and this subliminal exposure affected attitudes, behavioural intentions and voter turnout (Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski & Gross, 2007). Furthermore, the prime in a TV commercial of the Republican Party in the 2000 US Presidential Elections, in which the word ‘RATS’ was flashed for some milliseconds near the word Democrats, may have affected the evaluation of the Democrats (Weinberger & Westen, 2008). However, because of the length of time that the word RATS was visible and because it was not covered by a mask, it is possible that participants were able to consciously process the stimulus and therefore is ‘not strictly subliminal’ (Weinberger & Wester, 2008, p. 640).

Noguchi et al. (2010) already showed that political participation can emerge from general patterns of indiscriminate activity (e.g., impulsiveness, pace of life, and physical activity). By analysing data across different countries, they developed an action-tendency index that positively correlated with voter turnout; people who are generally active were more likely to go to the polls on Election Day compared to people who are more inactive in their life. Of course, one might argue that activity is just one more variable to explain voter turnout. However, we believe that this concept is very valuable to show the potential of subtle influence in political participation. Noguchi et al. (2010) showed, that such a manipulation is also possible with the concept of activism to affect voter turnout. Their experiment shows that
it is not necessary to increase the actual level of participants’ activism to increase voter turnout but that it can be enough to capitalize this concept in the decision making process via subtle cues. As such it also shows the importance of subtle processes in explaining voter turnout (e.g., real level of activism versus subtly manipulated activism). However, the fact that stimulating activism in participants increased their likelihood to participate in elections during a lab experiment is not enough to extend this principle effectively into real world campaigns. Too little is known about when and how these effects will also occur outside the lab and how they can be controlled. For instance, subtly increasing the level of activism might not only affect voting behaviour but also other activities that might even get in the way of moving people to the polls on election day. In other words, even though Noguchi et al. (2010) already showed that subtle persuasion in affecting voter turnout actually works, it is not clear how this process works.

This uncertainty about when and how subtle persuasion works is part of the ‘second generation’ questions of priming, which are asked when the effect of priming as such has been well established (Bargh, 2006). One particular question that arises is what enables participants to link a specific stimulus (action/inaction) to a specific target variable (voter turnout). The manipulation of the elderly concept, which was central in a classic experiment, serves as a good example. On the one hand, the elderly prime can be used to affect walking speed, as shown by Bargh, Chen and Burrows (1996). On the other hand, the same prime can also affect the concept of memory, e.g. participants who are primed with the stereotype of elderly are more likely to forget things (Wheeler & DeMarree, 2009, see also Wheeler & Berger, 2007). These different effects of a single stimulus show that it is necessary to know how the effects of a stimulus can be tailored towards a specific target. As a first step towards this direction, we aim to provide more details on how participants link a stimulus towards a target variable. We conducted two priming experiments to explore the potential effects of subtle and subliminal priming with action and inaction words.

**STUDY 1**

**Aims**
The aim of the first study is to uncover the effects of action/inaction words in subtle influence methods. So while the action/inaction words are consciously processed, the participants do not consciously link these stimuli towards a target variable. Unlike the study of Noguchi et al. (2010), which was conducted in the lab, we extended the experiment to a real life election
environment by conducting a field experiment. We expected that there would be a significant difference between participants who would process action words versus inaction words on their intention to vote. Since the laboratory results mentioned earlier indicate that the action words can affect behavioural intentions regarding participation, the following hypothesis was formulated:

\textit{H1: Participants who are primed with action words will report a stronger intention to participate in elections than participants who are primed with inaction words.}

Besides the score of behavioural intention, the attitude towards this issue was also measured. By measuring both behavioural intention and attitude it was possible to give detailed explanations about the way the prime is working, e.g., via an attitude change or by affecting behavioural intention directly. Based on this, we formulated the following hypothesis:

\textit{H2: Participants who are primed with action words will report a more positive attitude towards electoral participation than participants who are primed with inaction words.}

\section*{Method}

\subsection*{Design}

To test the above hypotheses we conducted a field experiment with a two-group design to compare the effects of action- and inaction words in a real life election environment (a municipal election in Germany). Ensuring that participants would see and therefore consciously process all priming words before measuring the dependent variable we used two word-puzzles. In these puzzles we included either the action or inaction words, depending on the experimental condition. To minimize the likelihood that participants would consciously link the stimuli with measurement, we included each word-puzzle in a brochure that gave general information about the municipal elections (see Figure 1). The brochure served therefore as a stimuli-cover. We conducted the study at the residence of the participants.

![FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE ]

\section*{Manipulation words}

Noguchi et al. (2010) used the action words \textit{go} and \textit{move} and the inaction words \textit{relax} and \textit{stop} in their laboratory experiment. We also used these four words in the field experiment and extended them with similar action and inaction words to increase the total number to five, i.e. \textit{go, move, jump, run} and \textit{join} as the ‘action words’ as opposed to \textit{relax, stop, hold, rest, and}}
pause as ‘inaction words’. Furthermore, ‘neutral words’ were added to the puzzle. This had already been done in earlier subliminal and unconscious priming-studies wherein neutral words were used to cover the stimulus (Bargh et al. 2001; Dijksterhuis et al. 2005; Noguchi et al., 2010; Weinberger & Westen, 2008). Furthermore, increasing the total number of words used in the puzzle is related to the unconsciousness of the stimulus. Because people’s short-term storage capacity in word-tasks is limited to about three to seven items (Smith & Kosslyn, 2009), the use of neutral words will increase the chance that participants will not remember the priming words consciously when measuring the independent variable. Also, neutral words are useful to cover the positive and negative primes due to the so-called ‘serial position effect’. By confronting the participants with neutral words at the beginning and at the end of the stimulus, it is more likely that they remember these words instead of items presented in the middle (Murdock, 1962). Therefore, two neutral words were placed at the beginning and at the end of the puzzles, i.e. wheel, waterfall, sky and river (see Figure 2).

[ FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE ]

Dependent variables
Based on earlier studies we used the concepts attitude towards voting and intention to vote (Brader, 2005; Noguchi et al., 2010) and attitude towards getting informed about the election campaign and intention to get informed about the election campaign (Brader, 2005) as dependent variables. So we measured both attitude objects in terms of an attitude as well as a behavioural intention. One example for the measurement of behavioural intention to vote was ‘I will vote in the upcoming election’, while an example for the measurement of attitude intention to be informed was ‘I think it is useless to vote in the upcoming election.’ We found the following Cronbach’s coefficient alphas: behavioural intention to vote (α of .94, three items), behavioural intention to be informed (α of .57, two items), attitude intention to vote (α of .86, two items), attitude intention to be informed (α of .80, two items).

Participants
A total of 62 people aged between 16 and 90 (M=43.7, SD=17.2) years, of which 34 (54.8%) were women, participated in study 1. They were randomly divided into two groups; 31 participants were primed with action words and 31 participants were primed with inaction words. None of the participants was aware of the real purpose of the experiment. After calculating mean age, frequencies of political affiliation and previous voting behaviour, we
compared these data between the two groups with a Chi-Square test and since we found no differences between the experimental groups ($\chi^2 (1) = .261, p = .610$) we concluded that the random assignment had been successful.

Analysis
We evaluated normal distribution and homogeneity of variance to check whether the assumptions of parametric tests were fulfilled by the dataset; however, only the parameters attitude intention to get informed was evenly distributed. Since transforming the data into a normal distribution was not successful, all other sub-constructs had to be analysed by non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney) (Moore & McCabe, 2008). Only the attitude intention to get informed was tested by using an Independent Sample t-test because of its normal distribution and homogeneity of variance.

Results
The results in table 1 show that participants who were primed with action words reported stronger behavioural intention to participate in the elections than participants who were primed with inaction words. This confirms hypothesis 1. Furthermore, participants who were primed with action words report higher attitude scores on political participation than participants who were primed with inaction words. This confirms, in part, hypothesis 2.

[ TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ]

In sum, study 1 shows that subtle influence on voting can indeed occur when participants consciously process information (words in the puzzle) that participants do not associate with voting but which does relate to, and influences voting. However, whether this also works when the processing occurs out of awareness will be explored in study 2, in which we tested the effects of action/inaction words in a subliminal setting.

STUDY 2

Aims
Study 1 showed that action/inaction words can affect voting when these words were presented visibly and therefore in a way that enabled participants to process these words consciously. Study 2 extends these findings by testing if the same effects occur, even when the words are
presented (almost) invisibly so that no conscious processing of these words would be possible. Therefore, study 2 tested the same hypotheses as study 1, but applied subliminal priming.

H3: Participants who are primed with action words will report a stronger intention to participate in elections than participants who are primed with inaction words

H4: Participants who are primed with action words will report a more positive attitude towards electoral participation than participants who are primed with inaction words

**Method**

Similar to study 1, we compared the *intention to vote* and *intention to get informed* between participants after we primed them with action or inaction words, depending on the experimental condition. The action/inaction words were the same as the ones used in the first study. However, instead of including these words in a words-puzzle the words were presented subliminally so that conscious processing of these words not possible. Because subliminal priming requires laboratory soft- and hardware, we decided to test the effects of subliminally presented action/inaction words in a laboratory experiment instead of a field experiment. Nevertheless, similar to the first study, we executed the experiment during real life elections. Study 1 was conducted shortly before municipal elections in Germany and the second study was performed in the laboratory of the Stony Brook University during the primary presidential elections in the USA in 2012.

**Subliminal Priming**

Making sure that the subliminal priming would be completely out of the awareness of the participants, best practices of subliminal priming studies were used. Specifically, participants were asked to fix their gaze on the middle of the screen as done by Bargh and Pietromonaco (1982). Participants expected to see a letter string whereby they had to indicate if the string was a real word or not. However, before presenting this letter string the participants were presented with a mask, the prime and an additional backwards mask: The prime was ‘presented for 28ms, preceded by a string of X’s (XXXXXXXXXXXXX) for 300 ms, and immediately followed by a string of #’s (############) for 300 ms’ (Karremans, Stroebe, & Claus, 2006, p. 794) to mask the prime. This form of ‘backwards masking’ (Weinberger & Wester, 2008, p. 636) was also used by Bargh and Pietromonaco (1982).

After that, the letter string was presented whereby participants had to indicate if the letter string was a real word or a random combination of letters (non-word) by pressing *D* for
a real English word and K for a random letter string. This lexical decision task was based on Burdein, Lodge and Taber (2006). This task was used as a cover story to hide the prime as done by Strahan, Spencer and Zanna (2002) and Burdein et al. (2006). Every prime word was shown separately and was repeated 6 times to increase effectiveness and to assure that participants would be exposed to the primes in case they were blinking during presentation of primes so that every subject was exposed to action or inaction words for 30 times. To control for order effects, the prime words were presented in random order. Thereby, half of the primes were followed by English words. The words were wheel, waterfall, sky, river, forest, car, house, street, computer, chair, table, coffee, phone, window and building. The non-words were badlo, torkorbas, hil, bikar, zakesp, gaw, gaske, brollet, reupatsa, kiare, elbor, jollri, hogok, boldit and doolwalg. Because the letter strings were constant across all conditions, there was no influence that could bias potential differences between the conditions. Also, all letter strings were pronounceable and in similar length to the prime words.

**Dependent variables**

Also in study 2 we used the concepts intention to vote and intention to get informed about the election campaign as dependent variables. We measured the internal consistency of the scale by using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha and found the following scores: behavioural intention to vote (α of .97, three items), behavioural intention to get informed (α of .94, three items), attitude intention to vote (α of .94, two items), attitude intention to get informed (α of .81, three items).

**Participants**

51 participants were included in this study. These participants were recruited from the Department of Political Science undergraduate research pool at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Participants were given extra credit for participation in the experiment. Of course, it could be argued that students in the field of political science might be more interested in political participation then others so that they are not a good representation of the general public. Nevertheless, this would only be problematic if their motivation to vote would be so high that effects of stimuli would be minimal, which was not the case. Similar to the first study, participants were randomly divided between the conditions; 23 participants were primed with action words and 28 participants were primed with inaction words. The unequal distribution among the conditions is due to the fact that some participants were excluded from the dataset because of outliers.
Analysis

We evaluated normal distribution and homogeneity of variance to check whether the assumptions of parametric tests were fulfilled by the dataset. Only the parameters *attitude intention to get informed* was thus distributed. Other constructs therefore have been analysed with non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney) (Moore & McCabe, 2008). Only the *attitude intention to get informed* was tested by using an Independent Sample *t*-test because of its normal distribution and homogeneity of variance.

Results

The results in table 2 show that, contrary to the results of the first study, participants in the action and inaction condition did not differ significantly on their behavioural intention to participate in the elections. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is rejected. Also for attitude, contrary to the findings of the first study, no differences between the action and inaction condition on attitude intentions were found in study 2 (see table 2). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is also rejected.

[ TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE ]

DISCUSSION

The main finding is that our studies provide evidence that subtle priming works with respect to electoral behaviour. When primed with words that are associated with action (e.g. *move, jump, run*) instead of words that are associated with inaction (*stop, pause, relax*), participants reported a stronger intention to vote and a stronger desire to become informed about the election (study 1). This happened outside the awareness of participants, because none of the participants realized that the word puzzle that included these words was used as priming stimulus, and hence we refer to this as ‘subtle priming’. These findings support the results of Noguchi et al. (2010), who reported a similar effect of subtle priming of action words on three aspects of political participation.

In study 2 we shifted our attention to an even subtler form of priming, one could say, namely subliminal priming. We used the same words as in study 1, but presented them on a computer screen for a few milliseconds and masked them with words that participants had to classify as words or non-words. Contrary to the findings of study 1, there were no significant differences between the action and inaction condition in study 2. In other words, while the
action/inaction prime did affect participants’ voting intentions when it was presented subtly, it did not when it was presented subliminally.

The results of study 2 lead to two questions. First, what is the reason that subliminal priming with action/inaction words did not have an effect, whereas the subtle, non-subliminal, priming did. We consider the most straightforward and plausible explanation that the effect only takes place if the action or inaction words are consciously processed. This will presumably activate associated constructs in memory and may bring individuals in a more active or more passive mood. The subconscious response to such stimuli apparently does not do this. The second question is why this finding contrasts with previous research in which subliminal priming did have an effect. We consider the most straightforward and plausible explanation that those priming effects typically resulted from the affect that was associated with the prime. In the case of the word ‘RATS’ or the picture of Bill Clinton (Weinberger & Westen, 2008), for example, the effects resulted from the presumed automatic activation of negative or positive affect by those stimuli. The primes that we presented do not have such an affective charge or valence.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper we tested the effect of subtle psychological processes on voter turnout. The results of our experiments show the importance of subtle processes for electoral behaviour. In the first study we showed that the construct of action/inaction is relevant for voter turnout. By including particular words in a word puzzle we showed that participants primed with the concept of action intend more strongly to vote in elections than participants who are primed with the concept of inaction. Study 2 shows that the way in which the action/inaction concept is presented to the participants is of high importance: when it was presented subliminally, no effects were observed. We believe that this is due to the fact that participants in study 1 were able to see and consciously process the stimuli while participants in study 2 were not. Conscious processing of such concepts appears to be a necessary condition for those effects. This contrasts with priming that is based on the affect that is associated with the prime objects, where conscious processing of the stimuli is not necessary.

The question arises what these findings tell us about reality. After all, not many citizens will complete a word puzzle with action or inaction words shortly before the election. We believe the main relevance is that these experiments, in particular study 1, show that the decision to vote or abstain is influenced by subtle psychological processes that concern factors
that have nothing to do with politics. Surely, many voters are strongly committed to voting whereas others are firm in their decision to abstain. For such voters there is not much room for the influence of such subtle psychological processes. However, many voters are in-between and whether they vote or abstain may depend on what happens in their life and this may have nothing to do with politics. If a weak stimulus like action words or inaction words in a puzzle can already have an effect, one can only imagine how strong the effect would be of events that are much more significant to the individual. Events that make people feel more depressed, will probably lower the chance that they vote, while events that make people feel energetic will increase their tendency to vote. This is the type of process that our experiments illuminate.

The concept of action/inaction can help to interpret findings from previous research about voter turnout. For example, some studies have shown that there is a relationship between weather conditions and level of turnout. The reason that rain depresses turnout while sunshine stimulates turnout may be that the weather influences the mood that people are in.

The findings of our experiments lead to questions that can guide future research. We would like to emphasize three questions that we hope future research will focus on. First, in our experiments the stimuli were very weak. It would be interested to replicate this type of experiment with much stronger stimuli and examine what happens if their mood is much more active or much less so. We do not want to encourage colleagues to bring participants of their studies into a state of deep depression (or euphoria, for that matter), but a small step in that direction would be welcome. Second, it is worth examining how long such effects last and if they transfer to actual behaviour. In our studies we focused on voting intentions, but future research may expand the dependent variables and also examine actual turnout. To fully explore this matter we also need to have more insight in the moment that voters make their decision to vote or abstain and what factors contribute to making this decision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


Figure 1: Brochure presented to participants in Study 1
Figure 2: Two versions of the word puzzle in the brochure (with key)
Table 1. Effects of the action/inaction prime on attitudes and intentions (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Action (n = 31)</th>
<th>Inaction (n = 31)</th>
<th>Significance (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards getting</td>
<td>M = 4.47, SD = 1.01</td>
<td>M = 3.79, SD = 1.14</td>
<td>t(60) = 2.48, α &lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informed*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards voting</td>
<td>Mdn = 5.50</td>
<td>Mdn = 5.00</td>
<td>U = 391.50, z = -1.29, α = .099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to get informed</td>
<td>Mdn = 4.00</td>
<td>Mdn = 3.00</td>
<td>U = 359.50, z = -1.73, α &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to vote</td>
<td>Mdn = 5.33</td>
<td>Mdn = 5.00</td>
<td>U = 361.00, z = -1.72, α &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* tested with t-test because data was normally distributed, in contrast to the other variables.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Action (n = 23)</th>
<th>Inaction (n = 28)</th>
<th>Significance (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards getting informed</td>
<td>M = 4.16, SD = 1.09</td>
<td>M = 4.05, SD = .98</td>
<td>T = .386, α = .701</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude towards voting</td>
<td>M = 3.48, SD = 1.13</td>
<td>M = 3.63, SD = 1.14</td>
<td>T = -.460, α = .648</td>
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<td>Intention to get informed</td>
<td>M = 4.19, SD = .98</td>
<td>M = 3.99, SD = 1.11</td>
<td>T = .678, α = .501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intention to vote</td>
<td>M = 3.87, SD = 1.25</td>
<td>M = 4.06, SD = 1.14</td>
<td>T = .566, α = .574</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>